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GENDER AND EXTREMISM IN ETHIOPIA

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About the author

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Acronyms

AU	African Union
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
MoP	Ministry of Peace
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
P/CVE	Umbrella term for strategies and approaches that aim to prevent or counter extremism
UN	United Nations
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
VE	Violent Extremism
WPS	Women, Peace and Security agenda

Executive Summary

This paper endeavored to provide a gender analysis on the role of women in violent extremism (VE) and government-led efforts on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in Ethiopia. It draws its findings and recommendations from three main research methods: a literature review, observation, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with actors involved in VE and P/CVE efforts across six Regional States in Ethiopia. The study firstly examines the role of women in extremism in Ethiopia, emphasising how and why women are involved in VE, including the gendered nature of association with VE groups. Among those that have been researched are the hardening of in-group identity, sense of community and seeking recognition, romanticism and fascination with a charismatic leader, as well as a sense of victimhood as a result of government action or inaction, including gender-specific violations. All are contributing factors; mostly compounded and cumulatively present in individual cases. Secondly, the study engages with the current standing P/CVE efforts led by the government, analysing the types of womanhood that the state mobilises and produces in the name of, and as part of, P/CVE efforts. While the research has been less conclusive in establishing a commonly agreed-upon definition of VE from respondents, it recommends the need for intersectionality-informed gender analysis in understanding women's participation in VE as well as in the designing and implementation of P/CVE measures.

Introduction

Violent extremism (hereafter referred to as VE) is a complex phenomenon stemming from multiple factors such as economic, political and religious ideologies that justify the use of violence for social or political change.[1] These beliefs can also be multi-factorial and intersecting; for example, grievances over socio-economic factors rooted in either ethnic or religious identity or both[2] within the framework of identity politics may result in radicalisation to VE.[3] Cognitive cues such as ideology, hardening of in-group affiliation and values, grievance thinking, self-righteous morality, and disengagement from moral constructs of a community are all plausible theories in understanding the association of persons with violent extremism.[4]

Like other social discourses, violent extremism is built on male conceptions, such as "power, competition, oppression, and aggression."[5] Hence, the majority of actors in VE are men, and tactics of engagement are mostly masculine. Such association of violent extremism as a masculinised sphere has resulted in a miscellany of security actors and institutions neglecting a gendered lens, including engaging with women's experiences of VE in research, policy formulation and implementation.[6]

Gender as a social construct has been defined in many different ways. Gender is not synonymous with women but rather encompasses the social constructions that underline how women's and men's roles, functions and responsibilities are defined and understood.[7] Therefore, gender-responsive

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[1] Bertjan Doosje et al., A. R. (2016). Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization. Current Opinion in Psychology, 11, 79–84.; see also Jason-Leigh Striegher, (2015). "Violent-Extremism: An Examination of a Definitional Dilemma" The Proceedings of 8th Australian Security and Intelligence Conference held from the 30 November – 2 December 2015 at Edith Cowan University Joondalup Campus Perth Western Australia pp. 75–86.

[2] Dereje Feyissa, (March 2011). The Potential for and Signs of Religious Radicalization in Ethiopia. Research Report Submitted to DFID-Ethiopia.

[3] "Radicalization is the process by which people come to adopt beliefs that not only justify violence but compel it, hence it captures progress from thinking to action"; see Randy Borum, (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. Journal of Strategic Security, 4(4), 8.

[4] Randy Borum, (2014). Psychological Vulnerabilities and Propensities for Involvement in Violent Extremism. Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 32(3), 286–305.

[5] Erella Shadmi, (2000). Between resistance and compliance, feminism and nationalism. Women's Studies International Forum, 23(1), 23–34.

[6] Laura Shepherd, (2009). Gender, Violence and Global Politics: Contemporary Debates in Feminist Security Studies. Political Studies Review, 7(2), 208–219; Fionnuala Ni Aolain, (2015, September 17). Counter-Terrorism Committee: Addressing the Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Just Security. https://www.justsecurity.org/25983/counter-terrorism-committee-addressing-role-women-countering-terrorism-violent-extremism/ (Last accessed 19 July 2021).

[7] 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering terrorism' A/64/211 para.20.

approaches to violent extremism address the different needs and experiences of women and men and the power asymmetry rooted in traditional traits associated with femininity and masculinity.[8]

Though gender is not synonymous with women, there is overwhelming evidence that women and girls are affected by and participate in violent extremism in unique and differential ways.[9] However, engagements in research and policy continue to extend accounts of men as the standard and shared experience of all humans.[10] As a result, women are noticeably underrepresented in the realm of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) analysis, policy-making and implementation. It should be emphasised that women's inclusion in such analysis is not a question of representation alone but also a recognition of their diverse and unique standpoints in shaping and experiencing VE.[11]

Decades of feminist scholarship on gender and security have shown that women's experience of political violence is complex and multi-dimensional. Hence, gender analysis requires understanding women's experiences with an intersectional lens taking into account factors such as ethnicity, religion, age, socio-economic position and disability status. Categorising women as a monolithic group allows for gaps in policy; for example, women from marginalised ethnic or religious identities may find it even more difficult to access formal political outlets to express their socio-political grievances, likely leading to seeking alternative venues.[12] In the anticipation that these alternative venues may move from the margins to the centre of the political arena, women sharing such identities may circumstantially find themselves forming or joining a VE collective that is accessible to them. Therefore, these layers of identity compounded with other socio-political factors are worth taking note of in assessing a woman's proximity and exposure to outlets of VE.

Against this backdrop, this research will focus on the role of women in extremism in Ethiopia,[13] emphasising how and why women are involved in VE, including the gendered nature of association with VE groups. Furthermore, it will look into the nature of key government programmes in response

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[8] CEDAW General Recommendation No.25 on Temporary Special Measures, CEDAW/C/2004/Wp.1/Rev 1. Note 2.

[9] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, (2016). The 'war on terror' and extremism: assessing the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. International Affairs, 92(2), 275–291.

[10] Carol Cohn, (2012). Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures (1st ed.), P.24

[11] Katherine E. Brown, (2019). Gender, governance and countering violent extremism (CVE) in the UK. International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, 100371.

[12] Christine Chinkin and Hilary Charlesworth, (2006). Building Women into Peace: the international legal framework. Third World Quarterly, 27(5), 937–957.

[13] Here, the researcher supports the argument by feminist scholars that "all knowledge production not explicitly labeled feminist (gender) has implicitly studied men." Hence, emphasis on the experience of women alone, although may result in gaps in holistic understanding of gender, is necessary for redressing pervasive gender inequalities and recentering/devoting resources back to women. See also Tal Peretz, (2016). Why study men and masculinities? Theorized research review. Men, Masculinities, and Violence, 12(3), 32-33. Retrieved from: http://gjss.org/sites/default/files/issues/full/GJSS%20Vol%2012-3.pdf

to such concerns, thereby analysing the types of femininity that the state mobilises and produces in the name of, and as part of, P/CVE efforts. Ultimately, the report provides a more fine-grained analysis of women's role in VE and the gendered nature of VE interventions.

Ethiopian Context

A range of factors make Ethiopia vulnerable to domestic and transnational violent extremism. While factors such as poverty and distribution of resources, ethnic and religious composition, and geography have a compound impact, contestation over political vision and shape of the Ethiopian state remains central in the featuring of VE. The 2021 report on Fragile States Index ranked Ethiopia as the eleventh most fragile state and the third most worsened fragile context in the world. According to the report, Ethiopia's latest rank is attributed to growing *de facto* power groups and complex conflicts.[14] The devastation of the war in Tigray, Oromia, and parts of the Amhara and the Afar region, the rampage of violent state and non-state actors in most parts of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz, as well as separatist agitations in some parts of the country, all contribute to Ethiopia's fragility.

While the said fragility stems from different sources, violence between different ethnic groups owing to competing visions of Ethiopia's political future is recurring.[15] Competing ethnic-based interests of the past and present have produced alternative political forces, including those publicly endorsing VE as a means to achieve corresponding political goals.[16] Despite such concerns featuring in many regions across Ethiopia, research and policy interest in addressing a wide range of factors leading to VE has been limited. For example: in most (though not all) of the existing research on VE, there is a focus on religious fundamentalism as a stand-alone factor.

Such policy and research emphasis on religion interact tidily with global donor-driven vernacular fixated on religious extremism. Hence, instead of having to address varying contextual factors contributing to VE, policy and research actors including the government were fitting into the heavily-resourced global mould.[17] Moreover, the supposition by the pre-2018 government was that ethnic tensions were effectively controlled by the state; as a result, a focus on religion was prioritised. Such

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[14] The Fund for Peace. (2021, May). Fragile States Index 2021 – Annual Report. https://fragilestatesindex.org/2021/05/20/fragile-states-index-2021-annual-report/ (Last accessed 07 May 2021)
[15] Ibid
[16] Semir Yusuf (2021, February). Managing Ethiopia's ethnic divisions through constitutional design. Institute for Security Studies. https://issafrica.org/research/east-africa-report/managing-ethiopias-ethnic-divisions-through-constitutional-design

[17] Interview with a civil servant (man), Ministry of Peace (and previously Ministry of Federal Affairs), Addis Ababa, September 2021.; Dereje Feyissa (n2)

predisposition by the Ethiopian government – a state-centric, top-down interventionist approach – which was an anchoring ideology of the law enforcement strategy, was then met with active resistance. Particularly, the Muslim community was unnerved by the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council being subjected to tight surveillance and targeted for the anti-extremist national training program by the then Ministry of Federal Affairs, which morphed into an organised and sustained protest across the country under the slogan "Demtsachen Yitsema" [let our voices be heard].[18] This exclusive focus on religion and specifically on Islam – when rife with stereotypical assumptions – is lethal and inefficient; the concern for which is now voiced in a growing body of literature in the field.[19]

The Ethiopian government has been showing an interest in developing a national P/CVE strategy since 2012. In early 2013, the Minister of Federal Affairs approached the European Union (EU) for funding for a workshop that would bring together relevant individuals from ministries and regional bureaus of security, prisons, education, health, and development to establish the framework of a "National Strategy for Countering Extremism." This work was vetoed by other federal security agencies, particularly NISS, who at the time saw countering violent extremism (CVE) as being their core business. Through engagement with the security sector, including NISS, INSA, the Federal Police and the ENDF, in partnership with Ethiopian think tanks and academic organisations, the international community continued to encourage the development of a national strategy on P/CVE. These efforts did not yield tangible results as the Ministry of Federal Affairs grappled with mandate ambiguity.

The policy direction of P/CVE in Ethiopia however, has evolved considerably in the last three years, and the field of peace and security has now broadened beyond religious fundamentalism. As such, there are a growing number of government-led programs on community dialogues in regional states along with modest inter-ethnic dialogue initiatives amongst grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs) working on peace. In order to accommodate the broadening of programme interventions, the Ethiopian government has designed a range of ad-hoc interventions, programmes and legislations aimed at combatting terrorism and violent extremism. This includes the revision of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) and explicit assigning of aspects of P/CVE work to a newly established ministry, the Ministry of Peace.

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[18] Eelco Kessels et al., "Violent Extremism and Instability in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Examination of Drivers and Responses," Global Center on Cooperative Security, April 2016
[19] Fionnuala Ni Aolain (n 9)

The setup of the Ministry of Peace (MoP) in 2018 provided the international community with an Ethiopian government partner with the mandate to work on P/CVE at a national level which also had (a level of) oversight of key elements of the security sector, including NISS, INSA and the Federal Police.[20] However, in the founding proclamation, which outlined the powers and duties of the ministry, mandates on P/CVE were given in a (yet again) generic and vague manner, mainly focusing on promoting aspects of peace instead of preventing and reducing violence.[21] Instead of capitalising on differences, the MoP claimed its departure from the past, reorienting into the culture of peace via age-old Ethiopian ethos and commonalities.[22] It is the Ministry's belief that peace is as much a norm of the custom and tradition of Ethiopian society as it is embodied in the collective morale and politics.

While the MoP underwent a teething process and continues to entertain internal debates on the methodology of work – there has been far from consensus on this point from both internal staff and partnering and overseeing institutions – it seems to have tentatively adopted the methodology of "positive peace mapping" as part of its National Peace Strategy, details of which are yet to be communicated to the public. Hence, programmes on P/CVE predominantly embodied "peace as the norm" and "positive peace pillar mapping" principles in a society the ministry considers to be "ethical", steering away from previous focus on violent actors and actions.[23] While this sentiment remains intact, following the 2021 elections, a new proclamation conferred an unequivocal mandate upon MoP as it approved engagement on "preventing ethnic, religious and other forms of violent extremism(s)."[24]

However, such efforts are yet to actively embrace a gender lens. In its social and cultural makeup, Ethiopia is a deeply patriarchal society, an extension of which is reflected in P/CVE efforts. Patriarchal societies in general, and in Ethiopia in particular, curtail the full realisation of women's rights. Despite the country committing to the protection and promotion of women's human rights and equality by

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[20] Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Ethiopia https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/ethiopia/ (Last accessed 07 May 2021).

[21] Definition of powers and duties of the executive organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1097/2018, Federal Negarit Gazeta, Year 25, No. 8, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Article 13(2) "The powers and duties given to the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs by the provisions of other laws currently in force are hereby vested in the Ministry of Peace. See also, Article 13(1) (c).

[22] Ibid, Article 13(1) (e) "in cooperation with concerned bodies, promote the enhancement of cultural exchange, civic education, and artistic works that build national unity and consensus"; Interview with a civil servant (man), Ministry of Peace (and previously Ministry of Federal Affairs), Addis Ababa, September 2021.

[23] Interview with an adviser (man), Ministry of Peace, Addis Ababa, August 2021.

[24] Article 41(1) (d) of proclamation number 1263/2021 "በሃይማኖት፣ በብሄርና ሌሎች ምክንያቶች ሽፋን የሚደረግ የአክራሪነትና የጽንፈኝነትን አስተሳሰብ ለመከላከል የሚያስችሉ ስልቶችን ይቀይሳል፣ ያስፈጽማል"; Members of parliament have approved proclamation number 1263/2021, amendment to 1097, aimed at detailing powers and duties of executive bodies of the new Ethiopian government post October 2021. See: https://www.fanabc.com/english/house-approves-draft-draft-bill-regulating-powers-and-duties-of-executive-bodies/ (last accessed 20th October, 2021)

ratifying several core international treaties and regional frameworks, national policies and programs make little effort to explore the diverse role of women in VE.[25]

Women are expected to remain loyal to the patriarchal structure and institutions, including religion and ethnicity, and take no purposeful initiatives of their own.[26] As a result of these stereotypes, women are seen either as hapless victims – of direct targeted violence and male-dominated political upheaval – or as a peaceable panacea in P/CVE.[27] Note that not only (informal) VE groups, but also government offices that seek to prevent and counter extremism, draw on ideas – or "gender myths" – about women's roles in society.[28] Therefore, strategies and policies (many at a draft stage) mention women under sections dealing with vulnerable groups or treat them as categories absent in the field of peace and security.

Additionally, the traditional and implicit view on gender remains "peace first, gender later", jettisoned as "there are real problems to be dealt with at the present."[29] There has been evidence of women playing diverse roles in extremism and conflict in Ethiopia – as they do around the world – not only as peacebuilding agents but also as propagators, violence-mongering political figures, mobilisers, logistics planners, financial conduits, sympathisers, perpetrators, and informants.[30] Nevertheless, women are conspicuously absent from P/CVE interventions and if at all included, it is in a way that ignores the nuances of women's agency and the growing clamour for gendered security governance.[31]

Methodology

The research draws on data generated from fieldwork via open-ended and semi-structured interviews, observation and desk review conducted between May-October 2021. It covered six regions with a

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[25] Including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ("CEDAW"), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR"), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ("ICESCR") and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the "Maputo Protocol"), among others.

[26] Indrawatie Biseswar (2008). A new discourse on 'gender' in Ethiopia. African Identities, 6(4), 405, 425.

[27] Kathleen Kuehnast, (2015). Women Preventing Violent Extremism: Charting a New Course. (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2015), www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Women_Preventing-Violent-Extremism-Charting-New-Course%20(2).pdf (Last accessed 07 May 2021) pp.7-9.

[28] Fionnuala Ni Aolain (n 9)

[29] Interview with an adviser (man), Ministry of Peace, Addis Ababa, September 2021

[30] Emebet Mulugeta Tefera, (2005). The Invincible Invisibles: Ethiopian Women in Conflict and Peacemaking. In E. Natukunda -Togboa, & D. R. Montero (Eds.), Gender and Peace Building, 113-125.

[31] In light of the changing global security context, UN Security Council resolutions including one with explicit referencing to P/CVE, resolution 2242 was passed in recognition of the differential role and impact of VE on women. Continentally, the African Union also made such recognition in the Maputo Protocol, AU African Youth Charter, through the appointment of Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2014 and consequently in designing the Continental Results Framework (CFR) for the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa.

history and current vulnerability to violent extremism, including those with ongoing conflicts convulsing Ethiopia at present.[32] Mekelle and Wukro of the Tigray region, Gondar and Bahir Dar of the Amhara region, Hawassa – the capital of Sidama and SNNPR –, East Hararghe, Addis Ababa and the surrounding Oromia special zone of Oromia, Jigjiga of the Somali region, and Benishangul-Gumuz. The researcher conducted field visits of all sites except for Benishangul-Gumuz, where interviews with persons from the region were conducted via phone. Furthermore, experts, key informants and individuals from the selected regions were also interviewed in Addis Ababa – one of the two chartered cities and seat of the federal government of Ethiopia. The researcher met with community mobilisers and activists in exile in Kenya and Somaliland, from Hararghe, Ogaden, Tigray and Jinka. Information gathered from these interactions as well those virtually conducted with Oromo, Tigrayan and Amhara activists based elsewhere in the diaspora only served as complementary data to interviews that took place in Ethiopia.

Interviews conducted with 45 participants, comprising 28 women and 17 men, constitute the primary data for this research. The findings draw on thirty-three in-depth interviews and twelve key informant interviews in understanding the gendered forms of recruitments and motivations of women and girls joining violent extremist groups as well as framings of state and community level P/CVE interventions. Interviews were conducted with women and men living in regions vulnerable to VE activity or where groups associated with violent extremism operated (three individuals from each region; two women and a man, n=18). To this end, a feminist perspective was employed – instead of having to "add women into male experiences, whereby the findings from research on men are generalised to women"[33] – a broad-based knowledge involving lived experiences of women and men were taken into account. Moreover, such incidents were examined in light of the socially constructed nature of gender roles and their impact on personal sense of security and (non)association with violent extremism.

While the data collected from men were mainly in their capacity as government officials, advisers, diaspora-based political influencers, and administrators of peace and security projects (n=17), most women (n=12) interviewed were either currently or formerly associated with ideologies of violent extremist groups or were the subject of unsuccessful recruitment attempts. Hence, they reflected on

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[32] These regions were purposefully selected for reasons of association with conflict and VE, as detailed in the sampling section. Due to paramount safety concerns during the period in which the research was conducted, cities and particular venues were selected based on the preference of study participants as well as the interviewer.

[33] Nicole Westmarland, (2001). 'The quantitative/qualitative debate and feminist research: a subjective view of objectivity.', Forum: qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2 (1). p.13.

their lived experiences. The other category of women (n=16) were activists and key women figure in ethnic and religious discourse based in the capital city and from the diaspora (n=8), heads of government offices and women politicians (n=3), and those with knowledge and access to policy platforms on Women, Peace and Security (WPS, n=5). The data collected from the latter category of women (n=16) and all categories of men (n=17) complemented the information collected from the first category of women (n=12) on their association or non-association with the groups. As men's roles and gendered experiences are not the main focus of the research, the number of male interviewees is smaller than women interviewees.

Personal observation as well as scholarly literature and programme and policy documents on WPS and P/CVE were used. Hence, source materials that represent the voices of groups and the organisations under investigation were incorporated.[34] It was, therefore, essential to analyse press releases, party programmes, day-to-day political commentaries, and social media posts with implicit and explicit gender references as it relates to violent extremism. To limit the volume of data, texts and images produced and published starting 2018 – in the wake of the reform, and when Ethiopian media and the political class grew into deep divisions – were used.

Sampling

The research applied a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their centrality in implementing the WPS and P/CVE agendas[35] through pre-existing networks. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to suggest another person whose perspectives they think might be relevant to fulfil the study objectives. Unless otherwise cited, statements and conclusions in this research are drawn from these interviews.

The Research Gap

While there is one study that briefly discusses the influence of women in religious extremism,[36] until now, virtually no research within the context of Ethiopia has exclusively explored women's roles in VE and P/CVE efforts via a gendered lens. Though modest in scope and done to prompt further

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[34] Tjitske Akkerman, (2015). Gender and the radical right in Western Europe: a comparative analysis of policy agendas. Patterns of Prejudice, 49(1–2), 37–60.

[35] Jenny Lorentzen, (2021). Women as 'new security actors' in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali. International Affairs, 97(3), 721–738.

[36] An unpublished report by Inter Africa Group in collaboration with Directorate General of Religious Affairs (Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs) titled "Countering the Threat of Violent Extremism in Ethiopia."

investigation in the discipline, this research is intended to provide a novel analysis of gender and violent extremism in Ethiopia.

Challenges: What is and is not Captured in the Findings

The concept of violent extremism remains complex, operating in generalised tropes and against highly polarised backgrounds, especially within the Ethiopian socio-political discourse.[37] As a result, the definition is plagued by the old adage, "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," i.e., what is a violent extremist group or a figure associated with VE for some, including the state, may be hailed as a hero/heroine, freedom fighter for others.[38] Hence, investigation of selected communities and associations in this research should in no way be considered as an objective categorisation of violent extremist groups, rather a mere reflection of their current placement within the legal and socio-political conditioning of contemporary Ethiopia as narrated by interviewees.[39]

Data were collected in several phases between May 2021 and October 2021, with interruptions in between due to growing insecurity associated with conflicts in the regions of Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara, and the 2021 Ethiopian general election. These challenges interrupted access to interviewees as restrictions were imposed on the researcher's mobility, thereby necessitating an extension of the time allocated for the project. In addition, despite explicit communication regarding research confidentiality, it is possible that the political situation and sensitivity of the research subject in the current context, where mutual trust is quite volatile, could have affected the transparency of the exchanges. For example, extensive enquiries were carried out to understand involuntary recruitment and exit patterns from VE groups as well as influence from foreign actors, if any – all to no avail. Hence, the scope of research is limited to homegrown radicalisation and voluntary predisposition to VE ideologies and groups. Only factors emphasising the autonomy of the individuals who chose to

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[37] Terje Østebø et al., (2021). Religion, Ethnicity and Charges of Extremism: The Dynamics Inter-Communal Violence in Ethiopia. [online] Eip.org. Available at: https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ostebo-et-al-2021-Religion-ethnicity-and-charges-of-Extremism-in-Ethiopia-final (Last accessed 07 May 2021). P.31.
[38] While groups such as TPLF and OLA are met with widespread odium including recent designation as terrorist organizations by the Ethiopian parliament, they continue to enjoy a wide base of support as highly revered freedom fighters amongst opposing political class of Tigrayan and Oromo roots, among others. Note that amidst such polarization engineered on in-group affiliation on one hand and state-sponsored propaganda and bias on the other, it is impracticable and beyond the scope of the research to identify VE groups that can be agreed upon by all parties.
[39] Note that the research is informed by the perception and level of understanding of VE among people that were interviewed. Akin to previous studies by EIP (Østebø et al., n 37), the focus of the research has been on the informants' narratives and images of violent extremism. Hence, while VE is commonly defined as "the exercise of power through violent acts to change status quo and the ruling structures illegitimately" in different pieces of literature referenced above and should not be conflated with other types of conflict; it is equally important to note that definitions of what and who qualifies as extremist and as VE group varies among different groups in Ethiopia.

engage in VE using their own agency and mainly against various perceived social injustices are discussed. Therefore, what this study inevitably focuses on is only on those who discussed their own agency in endorsing ideas of and joining VE groups. By way of illustration, all groups were attempting to keep a more humane face of VE groups by actively discussing agency rather than coercion in participation. Taking these caveats into account, data collected from the selected regions should not in any way be referenced as statistically representing the entire country.

It should also be noted that latest allegations of wide-ranging human rights abuse against the Ethiopian government by international entities – who have extensively covered different aspects of the ongoing war and conflict in Ethiopia – unnerved state level leadership. As a result, government representatives were wary of discussing the subject matter in light of a rapidly growing coverage of the security status of Ethiopia by foreign organisation affiliates, researchers included. Similarly, the over-securitised and politicised nature of VE in Ethiopia has forced think tanks and CSOs to eschew interrogation of policies and programmes on P/CVE. Particularly, CSOs working on gender and women's rights said discussions on VE were "too political" and beyond the infrastructural scope of their organisation. While this widespread assumption is worrying, one should note that this too (i.e., labelling of engagement as "too political" or "too complex" for CSOs working on women's rights) is a gender stereotype produced within the peace and security sector. Hence, interviews were limited to CSOs working on peace, and not necessarily those engaged in women's rights.

Ethical Considerations

The study is informed by a feminist research ethic.[40] Therefore, power relations were carefully attended to throughout the data gathering process.[41] Furthermore, research participants were acknowledged as active contributors in the research process as well as important stakeholders in receiving final results. As such, a consultative communication was established, where the initial draft report along with corresponding implications of the research were shared with the interviewees, in a manner that was open for continuous feedback. To preserve the respondents' anonymity, only the month, location, gender, and group or professional affiliations of the interviewees are identified in this document.

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[40] Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, (2020). Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science (2nd ed. 2020 ed.). Springer.
[41] Note that feminist research stresses the importance of acknowledging one's identity and status and how such positionality will affect research participants.

Gendered Perceptions of Extremism and Violent Extremism

At the time of this research being carried out, a number of events highlighted the significance of violent extremism. The kidnapping of female university students; a subtle regime of enforced dress codes and behaviours in strict religious communities and areas under control of extremist groups; systemic rape and reproductive health violations during conflicts – these and other patterns of gendered violence across many regions of Ethiopia brought attention to the deliberate targeting of women and girls in VE activities. At the same time, the country has also witnessed a rise in the visibility of women in VE as ideologues, financiers and active perpetrators. Hence, the gendered conceptualisations embedded in different P/CVE strategies and their implications for women, along with factors for the association of women with VE, will be interrogated in upcoming sections.

I.   Women's Participation in Violent Extremism

Women's involvement in violent conflict is not a new phenomenon – women have participated in geographically and ideologically diverse manifestations of violent extremism throughout Ethiopia's history. The fact that women can indeed facilitate and perpetrate violence underlines the need for Ethiopia to firstly recognise the potential of women as violent actors, and, secondly, include a gendered approach in its larger P/CVE strategy to better comprehend the ways in which women engage in violent extremism, and how VE establishments, then in turn, engage with them.[42]

A frequently heard remark from government-affiliated persons in this study was that there was not enough evidence of women taking part in VE. On the contrary, a considerable number of grassroots opposition activists and CSOs working on peace noted a surge in participation of women in diverse political enterprises including VE, especially following the 2016 mass demonstrations, predominantly in the Oromia and Amhara regions of the country.[43]

Although there is surface-level awareness of the gendered and unequal dynamics VE creates for women, there remains far less understanding of the gender-specific reasons why women support and

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[42] The understanding and findings of VE that emerged from analysing the answers provided by respondents to questions of "what" and "which groups/collective action qualifies as VE?" are diverse and underpinned by either government labelling of groups and individuals as "terrorist", or alignment with other opposing political groups/ideals. Rather than the researcher seeking to categorise persons or groups as VE, the accounts cited below are the viewpoints held by the interviewees. See also Østebø et al., (n 37) and n 38 and 39.

[43] Awol Allo, (2017). Protests, Terrorism, and Development: On Ethiopia's Perpetual State of Emergency. Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal, 134.

join VE groups.[44] Women who radicalise in Ethiopia do so for various reasons that extend from freedom and agency to gender-specific victimisation by the state. Some of the reasons for women supporting and participating in VE may be the same factors driving men; however, gendered factors (personal, structural, or institutional) such as reaction to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or gendered abuse by state forces as well as the gendered ways women figures in VE are romanticised (considered "heroines") are unique to women.[45]

Furthermore, the way women are recruited into these groups may also be gendered with VE ideologies usually being discussed in private or semi-private (such as women's associations) spaces as opposed to men who are socially afforded such convening out in the public.[46] While factors for joining VE groups may be voluntary or involuntary, it should be noted that such positions exhibit fluidity based on changing circumstances in social interactions and ideological positioning. The dichotomy of push and pull factors as determinants for joining a violent extremist group may also exhibit fluidity as some negative factors that aid in pushing women to violent extremism may also be mixed up with pull factors attracting them to such groups.[47] As such, a range of factors discussed below have left women more susceptible to VE ideologies and in close contact with VE groups, where push and pull factors, and voluntary and involuntary participation overlap.

A.   Hardening of in-group Values and Attitudes

As political divides are on the rise, the hardening of in-group values and resultant attitudes and actions can manifest through pro-group VE behaviours. While women are less likely than men to commit violence in public,[48] they can play an active role in sustaining and buying into views of VE in social

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[44] UNDP and UN Women, (2020). Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia, pp.57-80.

[45] OSCE. (2019). Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism - Good Practices for Law Enforcement. OSCE.

[46] Gendered realities of men in Ethiopia demonstrate that men discuss politics while socialising in public which isn't necessarily a typical scene for women. Field visits also demonstrate the same, including pubs and bars serving as places where common vision of politics is discussed and those who chose to stay quiet or neutral are belittled. In one of the visits, it was in fact the women serving drinks telling the men "Even women are joining the fight and here you are in the city, failing to defend your nation, your woman", a scenario speaking to factors of motivation.

[47] While "push factors" are structural level conditions pushing individuals to ideas and actions of VE, "pull factors" are psychological and socio-economic/political triggers increasing the likelihood of individuals to embrace VE. For example, while social marginalization may increase vulnerability to radicalization and be considered a push factor, it may also come with a sense of belongingness and hardening of group identity, an appealing pull factor. See also: Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, (2020). Women who volunteer: a relative autonomy perspective in Al-Shabaab female recruitment in Kenya. Critical Studies on Terrorism, 13(4), 616–637.

[48] Erella Shadmi (n 5).

networks. Such contributing views to VE structures are, in fact, much more visible online; an arena the gendered nature of which is yet to be fully explored.

An Amhara human rights activist based in the US said:

> "Despite the state's ambivalent attitude towards the safety of Amhara's across the country, we continue to defend Ethiopia and our right to lead a decent and dignified life free of oppression, and possibly create an alternative political order where oneness is restored. The weight of our identity as Ethiopians and as Amharas, in particular, did not come from a paper [the Constitution] but, rather, via indefatigable struggles as torchbearers of the interest of the Ethiopian identity. The more I follow my community online, the more I am encouraged to live my truth and grow prouder of my Amhara heritage and history. At present, the Amhara youth fighting at the front, the brave Fano, are my heroes and that is a sense of attachment geography or distance cannot strip me of."[49]

Social media has been one of the most effective propaganda tools for spreading violent extremist ideologies and mobilisation in support of in-group values. This is particularly true for Ethiopians in the diaspora who are caught in a phenomenon referred to as "diaspora nationalism", the manifestation of which often includes advocating, financing and arming a nationalist movement, through mostly online community efforts.[50] Scholars term such form of political impulsion as "long-distance nationalism", an ideology grounded in nostalgia (i.e., idealised recollection of one's roots) and rejection (detesting realities of homeland, guilt and rage in exile) often heightened by a sense of community/sameness online.[51]

Although data relating to the exact percentage of women interested in VE content online is not accessible in Ethiopia, women have been voices of in-group VE ideologies and verbal hostilities in individual capacities ("lone wolf") and as part of organised groups. Social media has specifically enabled the creation of well-known online profiles, either anonymous (or fake) and real,[52] run by

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[49] Interview with an Amhara and Orthodox Christian identifying Human Rights activist in the US (woman), virtual, July 2021.
[50] Shashi Tharoor, "Diaspora Nationalism: The Myth and the Reality" accessible at https://english.mathrubhumi.com/mobile/news/columns/i-mean-what-i-say/diaspora-nationalism-the-myth-and-the-reality-shashi-tharoor-column-1.6016267 (last accessed 20 September, 2021)

[51] Ibid.
[52] In June 2021 Facebook Inc removed a network of fake and duplicated accounts for coordinated inauthentic behavior linked to individuals associated with INSA, the Information Network Security Agency of Ethiopia. See:https://about.fb.com/news/2021/06/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-ethiopia/ (last accessed 10th Novemeber, 2021). While state-level participation /contribution to VE will be covered in subsequent sections, the role of

women belonging to different groups in maintaining and reinforcing the distribution of VE ideologies.[53] While these women are highly likely to face gendered resistance, including different forms of sexism, if they were to support such ideas in person, the online space provides a relatively safer and physically removed engagement. The Internet thus creates opportunities for clandestine mixed gender interaction that is relatively safer and private for women wanting to participate in in-group VE initiatives, either anonymously or otherwise.

B.   Romanticism; Fascination with a Charismatic Leader

A Sidama academic and activist, a woman, displayed romanticism that was present in a number of interviews:

> "People speak of the bravery of Tayitu, a history that is ideologically and socially inaccessible to me, aside from aspersions cast on such historical figures as of late. I am rather fascinated by women of contemporary influence such as Tigrayan women fighters, past struggles of whom are extensively documented in books such as "sweeter than honey" and presently covered in international news and social media campaigns."[54]

A romanticised message and images of women fighters online, who seamlessly had to trade in their everyday life for a much-needed sacrifice, stand as a unique factor luring other women. Being part of something bigger than a woman's previously assigned position, jumping the fence of gender norms, had a specific appeal that spoke to many women looking up to these figures. Finding the state's convoluted vision unappealing, women's endorsement of VE is also driven by the potential to access power and amass the gendered status privilege (regarded as heroine) that comes with it.[55]

C.   Community Profiling and Oppression by Law Enforcement Targeting Ethnicity or Religious Identity

Security sector actors, including the military and police, play a significant role in how community-level P/CVE efforts are handled – either by alienating communities or buttressing partnerships and a sense

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social media in intensifying and protracting existing grievances and its contribution to VE and radicalisation is deserving of separate and detailed analysis.

[53] Whether these accounts are run by women or not continues to be debated upon, accounts by the name Veronica Melaku and Senait Mebrhatu were repeatedly cited in interviews as key contributors to the hardening of in-group attitudes and VE. Interview with Amhara women academics and political activists, Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar, August 2021.

[54] Interview with a Sidama rights activist and academic (woman), Hawassa, July 2021; A number of women I had interviewed spoke of TPLF women fighters like that of Fetlework, a.k.a Monjorino, whose reputation as a brave, intelligent security actor transcended ethnic affiliations; as the women being interviewed weren't necessarily from Tigrayan communities.

[55] Interview with woman academic and civil society leader, Jigjiga, May 2021.

of policy ownership. While research is sparse, reports have been published documenting grievances of women who have been impacted by abusive conduct of state security actors in the name of P/CVE efforts, such as when they are part of a group that is disproportionately targeted by these measures.[56]

A resident of Shashamene – a Muslimah Oromo Woman – described the situation:

> "Anytime there is a slight concern of security, the federal government forces along with the regional head down to 01 [my neighbourhood], which is known to be an Oromo-dominated zone of the city. Over the years, this has taken an increasingly authoritarian turn with significantly increased military power and heavy security presence in the area. The law enforcement units are infamous for brutal tactics, including amputation, mutilation and rape – instances of which are barely covered in mainstream media. The nascent anger and organising of young women is therefore rooted in fighting this partisan abuse, invited in the name of maintaining law and order.[57]"

P/CVE approaches in Ethiopia have often been based on flawed radicalisation theories that routinely target some segments of society on the basis of ethnicity or age, such as the youth. Organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have repeatedly expressed concerns about the implementation of such programmes, emphasising procedural gaps including abuse of power on the part of the police and public prosecutors.[58] This includes concerns that people have been arrested and denied due process of law, via procedures of "arresting first, and investigating later" in the absence of any credible evidence and transparent procedures on the handling of suspected or actual extremist behaviours.

Scholarly and policy initiatives have demonstrated how P/CVE initiatives can have a gendered and unique impact on women. This is especially the case when state-level violations target women in populations marginalised by religion, ethnicity, and other categories. When such marginalised populations are discriminated against and targeted by law enforcement, they are likely to seek refuge in alternative political venues including VE groups.[59] Therefore, a gendered lens in P/CVE programmes involves an understanding of the myriad of positions women occupy in society and the connections

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[56] Interview with a regional coordinator for the Pan-African Youth Network for the culture of Peace (PAYNCOP) and member of Youth4PeaceAfrica at AUC-PAPS department, Somaliland, August 2021.

[57] Interview with a Muslimah Oromo Woman, resident of Shashamene, October 2021.

[58] See: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/15/ethiopia-opposition-figures-held-without-charge; https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/10/ethiopia-boy-publicly-executed-oromia; https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/ethiopia-police-unit-unlawfully-killing-people-must-be-stopped/ (last accessed 20th, October 2021)

[59] Interview with Ogaden political activist previously in exile (woman), Hargeisa, August 2021.

between grievances that result from such programmes, and the conditions that make it conducive for women to join VE groups. For example, a woman may simultaneously experience gendered violations from state and non-state actors, such as from her immediate family, and may consider the latter the lesser of two evils, while the former may serve as a febrile atmosphere for increased interest in VE initiatives.

Interviewees have noted that charges of terrorism have been strategically deployed to criminalise dissent and signal the exclusion of individuals and groups from the political sphere. Some P/CVE efforts by the government were labelling groups such as Oromo and Somali as "suspect groups"; subjecting members of these communities to excessively violent measures. Where community members sensed their labelling as an automatic security threat, they spoke of government-led programmes from a position of disengagement, refusing to champion what they considered an extension of the "oppressive" agenda of the state.[60] Further, interviewees commented anecdotally that women in their communities whose loved ones are suspected of being involved in VE networks are overly-targeted by government forces for intelligence and security purposes,[61] driving them to seek alternative political outlets, counterproductive to what these government forces are aiming to do. While previous research suggested that incorporating women into the police force and policy realm may mitigate the targeting of women in such communities, when such an argument was forwarded by the researcher, interviewees strongly cautioned against the upholding of such thinking.[62]

D. Real (perceived) Sense of Victimhood as a Result of Government Action or Inaction

Anger at the state's failure – for example, frustration on the over-policing of a specific community or the failure to protect communities from widespread sexual violations in times of conflict – were documented as motivations behind women's involvement in VE in current Ethiopia. Interviewees noted that young women in the periphery (rural and marginalised communities) often feel dangerously alienated from narratives of the Ethiopian state and from the right to equality and freedom of opinion that underpins Ethiopia's constitution.[63] This particularly worrying pattern have been covered in the above sections, the concerns of which have been mostly raised by residents, and often political activists and influencers, of Oromia. Such perspectives suggest that oppressive actions

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[60] Interview with women community mobilisers from Somali and Oromo communities, June-August 2021.
[61] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/ethiopia-rape-extrajudicial-executions-homes-set-alight-in-security-operations-in-amhara-and-oromia/ ; https://mobile.twitter.com/AbaaBoraa/status/1340241374793363456 (Last accessed October 20th, 2021)
[62] Dessalegn Kebede Kedida, (2020). Police Women's Empowerment in Ethiopia. Oromia in Perspective. Police Women's Empowerment in Ethiopia: Oromia in Perspective, 50-64.
[63] Interview with Oromo political activist in exile (woman), virtual, June 2021

of the state and security forces targeting certain ethnic groups and in the name of P/CVE efforts have further hardened separate and potentially antagonistic identities to the detriment of a stable, all-embracing security infrastructure.

On the other hand, the inaction of the state in communities of Tigray and Gumuz has resulted in a high number of women either supporting ideologies of VE or joining armed movements.[64] Peace experts argue that personal trauma, most notably rape, stigmatises women, making them easier targets of recruitment and active vessels of VE.[65] To this end, a high level of conviction was recorded amongst such communities, where VE groups provided a sense of security and infrastructure to restore justice when all faith has been lost in the State.[66]

E.   Avenging

The executive director of a peace organisation, a man, said:

> "Gender is not exclusively dictated by culture but also politics. In some communities, women are the most bellicose in how they evoke popular collective memories of conflict and loss to motivate revenge killings, and rope their communities into retaliation."[67]

While associations with VE groups was high amongst individuals who see the state as the perpetrator of the injustice suffered in their lives, either through its action or inaction (as documented above), a crisis event in the life of a woman caused by non-state actors or rival groups can also be a contributing factor. Avenging the death of loved ones, loss of personal relationships or an effort to reclaim perceived or real historical imbalances and injustices i.e., communal grievances, hence, were key motivating factors. Here, VE is used as a way of "transforming victimhood into mastery"[68] when members of a particular community feel humiliated by the actions of other groups. In light of this, not only do women use these circumstances to endorse VE organising actively but they may also shame men and boys into joining, sustaining stories and feelings of loss to fuel organised anger.

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[64] Interviews with women community mobilisers of Tigray and Gumuz, June 2021

[65] Mia Bloom, (2010). Death Becomes Her: Women, Occupation, and Terrorist Mobilization. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *43*(03), 445–450.

[66] Interviews with women community mobilisers of Tigray and Gumuz, June 2021; read also accounts of women who have witnessed a range of violence at close range without protection from government and having to join the fighting here - https://mobile.twitter.com/declanwalsh/status/1414595861359833092

[67] Speaking on experiences of Gambella with Executive Director of an organization working on peace (man), Addis Ababa, August 2021

[68] Lynn Davies, (2008). Gender, education, extremism and security. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *38*(5), 611–625.

II. Representation of Women in Ethiopian Discourses on P/CVE

While there are no explicit government or institutional mechanisms recognising and supporting women's P/CVE roles and activities in Ethiopia, there are two ministerial-level efforts we can draw references from. The duration of this research marks two years since the launch of these programmes (ad-hoc interventions) that are supported by the Ministry of Peace and Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia. This timeframe allows for a reflection and tracking of impact through the years. While there are a bewildering number of short-lived peace initiatives (lacking national strategy and follow-up monitoring mechanisms) coming from different government ministries, the following examples are purposefully selected to demonstrate the gendered nature of P/CVE efforts.

More recently, a heightened focus on the inclusion of women has emerged in the context of peace and dialogue in Ethiopia, though not necessarily solidified and backed by structural and institutional gendered measures. Gendered assumptions and stereotypes about women's participation in peace have been remarkably sticky in government policy and programme thinking. Women are seen as natural peace agents, emphasising their biological role or stereotypical depiction. Hence, government-designed programmes on violent extremism are usually underpinned by widely held stereotypes about women, including depoliticisation and homogenisation of womanhood.

A. Project "a Shero Rejects Ethnic Divide [Jegnit Zere'gnten Teteyefalech]"

This particular project is an extension of the *Jegnit* [Heroine/Shero] flagship program under the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia. The programme had a nation-wide conference under the slogan of "ሴቶች ዘረኝነትን በመጠየፍ ለሰላማችን ግንባር ቀደም ሚናችንን እንወጣ!" which promoted the role of women abhorring and rejecting ethnic division (markers) in order to promote peace. The conference included women of diverse backgrounds, who were then interviewed as part of this research. While cognizant of diversity, the conference offered little guidance on tangible ways to overcome entrenched structural inequalities underlying ethnic and gender identities, which have a bearing on the effectiveness of P/CVE programmes in Ethiopia. Hence, the message largely failed to explore and analyse the intersecting identity of women, specifically their relationship to ethnicity.

Moreover, the discourse of "abhorring ethnicity for peace" implicitly sets women apart from men, with their interest in peace embedded in womanhood and trumping other forms of identities. This assumed potential of women, combined with the vague ideological foundation of the conference and engagements with the community, thereafter resulted in confusion and untenability of the program. The interviewees noted that such reductive rhetoric of womanhood has an unintended (and often

unavoidable) consequence of further alienating women grappling with interlocking systems of oppression such as ethnicity, class and religious inequalities from the arena of state and power.[69]

Conventional gender notions such as these, as they have been utilised in government programmes, fail to capture the fluidity of identities amongst Ethiopian women. While variables such as ethnicity and religion are complex and variously defined by geopolitical situations, they are particularly important to understanding women in Ethiopia.

This stereotypical depiction of women as a homogenous group whose interests are only confined to their womanhood (and unambiguously as "peaceful agents" at that) was met with resistance. Some of the women interviewed labelled such messaging as "unity-bent braggadocio seeking to impose the unchecked assimilationist [Medemer] project".[70] Furthermore, the women noted that a culture of peace shouldn't be treated as an abstract vision to be paraded in conferences rather one that needs to be actively built into communal relationships between and among citizens of the Ethiopian state.[71]

B. Mothers for Peace [Ye'selam Enatoch]

Mothers for Peace is an Ethiopian women's initiative comprising members from all regional states of Ethiopia to strengthen the culture of peace-making and dialogue.[72] *The Mothers for Peace* are active across Ethiopia and predominantly engage with politicians and student groups to mediate conflict. The initiative was born out of recurring challenges to peace and security in Ethiopia by the mothers themselves and later garnered help from the Ministry of Peace, among other government stakeholders.

Mothers for Peace was initiated with the slogan "*Mothers are a symbol of Peace*" and employed traditional/customary ways of engaging with a community such as kneeling and begging actors to come to peace tables through primarily emotional appeals. Statements they often used included "*by the breast that has fed you and the back that has carried you, make peace because you are valuable to every one of us*" and "*peace is the basis of everything, no one should hurt the other, and a mother should not cry because of losing her child*."

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[69] Interview with a Sidama rights activist and academic (woman), Hawassa, July 2021
[70] Ibd.
[71] Interview with Amhara women's rights activist (woman), Bahir-Dar, August 2021.; Interview with Former adviser to Minister of Women, Children and Youth (woman), Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, August 2021 and Interview with a legal adviser and women's rights advocate from Dawuro (woman), Hawassa, July 2021.
[72] United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and the African Union Commission (AUC). (2020). *She Stands for Peace: 20 Years, 20 Journeys*. https://unoau.unmissions.org/she-stands-peace-20-years-20-journeys-english p.96

The government was quick to recognise these women as a potentially de-radicalising force, positioning them as embedded security allies and peace makers.[73] As such, the question of peace at a certain point was in the hands of communal actors and mediators – and particularly in the hands of these mothers, who were assigned responsibility for the potential radicalisation of Ethiopian youth and political actors. While mothers carry high symbolic significance in most African societies, including in Ethiopia, as "essential building blocks of social relationships", such forms of essentialisation of mothers and emotional appeal require further structural interrogation.

Firstly, and in light of the current political context, the social capital of motherhood for peace is in a questionable state. Even religious and traditional leaders who transcend different social spaces and have a large influence on society are increasingly losing their common hold in the current Ethiopia. The political crisis has made it so that sacred institutions are trusted differently amongst different groups. *The Mothers for Peace* are no different. While they gathered at first for common peace goals, these mothers grappled with different identities that defined their relationship with peace and the state itself. In fact, following the Tigray war, the divide became apparent and the collective itself faced major internal tension, with some even endorsing the war, thereby losing credibility amongst certain communities.[74]

Secondly, the mothers were not granted institutional and structural access to peace tools other than emotional appeals, which emphasised the gendered assumption and essentialised all mothers as peace-loving agents. Though such a perception of mothers opens a way for greater agency, granting them opportunities to facilitate social reintegration and mediation, which was otherwise reserved solely for elderly men; it also lays an additional burden on women to promote peace, while having little to no regard for their principles, knowledge base and genuine access to political systems.

Hence such simplistic assumptions are problematic for many reasons, not least of all because they reinforce a stereotypical gender depiction of peace-wanting women/mothers. But they also ignore the challenges that peacemakers – women or men – may potentially face in a society like that of Ethiopia, where norms of conflict and violence permeate. While P/CVE efforts may need to engage with the social and cultural roles that women tend to play in many communities and families, they

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[73] https://ne-np.facebook.com/epaEnglish/photos/peace-mothers-movement-to-own-legal-entitye-p-a-ministry-of-peace-stated-that-th/946708389235181/ (last accessed 20th, October 2021)
[74] Interview with a Tigrayan peace worker (a woman with disability), Mekelle, June 2021

should do so thoughtfully and reflectively, aware of the gendered, intersectional, and institutional implications.

State Violent Extremism

Though current international legal frameworks and definitions of VE fall short of interpreting the ideological content of a state's violence, the state's potential as a VE actor is a recurring theme in the research.[75] While the capacity of women to participate in VE manifests more readily in pro-nationalist movements than institutionalised/formal government settings,[76] the Ethiopian experience at present demonstrates otherwise.

One interviewee, a male policy and research adviser, argued:

> "In order to provide a holistic view of violent extremism, I would [..] encourage us to look into the government doings and not exclusively focus on the usual "suspects," left in the margins of politics. The current government too has a virulent political system that is akin to its predecessor, and that it, ironically (despite a philosophy of compromise and reconciliation, i.e., "medemer"), could not resist but charge defiant political forces with spurious terrorism labels while overlooking the doings of its own."[77]

Gender analysis of VE should include not just women as non-state actors without formal power but also women within government structures contributing to the mobilisation, financing and increased activism in support of VE groups. One evident outcome of the Tigray war, and the subsequent "political elite" responses thereto, involves an extensive re-assessment of drivers of violent extremism within the state itself. State rhetoric and responses from members of the ruling political class signalled endorsement of violence beyond the well-defined general duties of the state, including endorsing and calling on violence by non-state actors in a manner that qualifies as VE.[78] Additionally, as Ethiopia grapples with its monopoly on force, the nature of state-imposed measures confronting either VE or

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[75] In his early days, it should be noted that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted to law makers that Ethiopian security forces and by extension the state committed "terrorist acts" against its own citizens in an effort to stay in power. This admission was made in the face of many being exonerated from charges of terrorism. See: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/19/ethiopia-pm-security-agencies-committed-terrorist-acts (Note that within peace and security discourse of the Ethiopian state, violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation are often used interchangeably.)

[76] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, (2013). Situating Women in Counterterrorism Discourses: Undulating Masculinities and Luminal Femininities. *Boston University Law Review*, *93*, 1091.

[77] Interview with policy adviser and researcher (man), Addis Ababa, August 2021.

[78] Interview with legal expert and Sidama community mobiliser (woman), Hawassa, August 2021; Interview with member of interim government of Tigray (man), Mekelle, June 2021.; Facebook (n52)

contending power holders have become increasingly dubious. Among others, documentation of extrajudicial killings and sexual violence by Ethiopian forces, grounded in certain ideologies and targeting civilians can account for violent extremism, the nuances of which merits further investigation.[79]

There are accounts of women in the state machinery not only endorsing state-sanctioned violence and participating in languages of warmongering, classification, and dehumanisation, but also as vocal supporters of para-state actors.[80] While interviewees shared semi-substantiated concerns over ethnic-based resource mobilisation amongst state-level politicians for paramilitary and regional special forces they considered to be VE actors (during the data collection phase), such form of support was later mainstreamed and openly endorsed by the government (by the time this research was in its editorial phase). Although accusations of supporting such structures need further scrutiny, there are several remarks made by female politicians disclosing sentiments of this nature.[81] These remarks are also closely related to intensifying ideological discourses in favour of a certain ethno-national agenda in the Ethiopian state machinery. However, little clarity exists as to their accountability in the VE arena where actors involved are agents of the state.

The Relationship between Violent Extremism and Violence Against Women and Girls

There appears to be limited systematic research uncovering the correlation between violent extremism and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in global policymaking.[82] While cases of VAWG exacerbated during incidents of VE are fairly well recorded, the link between exposure to VAWG and radicalisation into VE, state measures against VE resulting in higher cases of VAWG, as well as the rise in VAWG as a potential tell-tail sign of a community's endorsement of VE is poorly known.

One Tigrayan woman, providing an account that speaks to the link between exposure to VAWG and radicalisation, said:

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[79] HRW; Amnesty reports (n 58, 61)

[80] Interview with a woman politician, Amhara Regional State, Bahir Dar, August 2021.

[81] While the current government constitutes a greater number of women in power including presidents of high offices, ministers and high-level advisers, social media has witnessed their laudation in support of violent wars.

See https://www.dw.com/en/hate-speech-in-ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-resurrects-old-demons/a-55800705 ; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-idUSKBN29W1V4 (last accessed 28th Jan, 2021)

[82] Richard Jackson etal., (2011). *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (2011th ed.). Red Globe Press.

"During a coffee chat here with male colleagues [pointing to the tent-like makeshift coffee shop by the street corner] one of them asked us to join him in the front. I refused openly and said 'I do not feel safe travelling long distances with and accompanying men to the desert [*berha*].'

To my surprise, he raised a point that I pondered on for long, 'would you rather be raped by [enemy] soldiers sitting here then?' No way! I would rather die in fighting than be raped in this pogrom, I thought."[83]

In "suspect communities" of Ethiopia where abusive measures were recorded in the name of P/CVE efforts, and a series of public protests broke out, several accounts indicated a rise in VAWG at night, presumably by men needing to compensate for having been emasculated by the state, who sought out to reassert their masculinity in the face of that day's events.[84]

A woman from Oromia Special Zone said:

"Every protest comes at a high cost for women, either in the direct violence they face at home or in the attacks targeting establishments employing majority of women [a form of economic violence that calls for independent investigation of its own]. As social norms put a heavy caregiving burden on women, we assume the violence and hurt that is directed to us women is part of the collective [unspoken] pain. Our men were hurt and so, they hurt us. Where do we expect them to take their anger out when everything else other than the home is hostile to them? And if we speak of such violence in public, in the face of misinformation and lies that incessantly demonise Oromos, would not it dehumanise them [and us] further?"[85]

A correlation between the increased prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination and the outbreak of conflict immediately after can also be observed, as the former can serve as an early warning sign of the latter.[86] A growing body of research is speaking to such a claim as the rise in VAWG levels continue to be linked with greater vulnerability to conflict and VE ideologies. For example, rapid increases in the prevalence of VAWG, attributed to different factors (including Covid-19), were recorded in the regions of Amhara and Tigray before the outbreak of the war and

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[83] Interview, Tigrayan academic (woman), Mekelle, June 2021
[84] Interview, residents of Oromia Special Zone (women), Galaan, Buraayyuu and Finfinnee, June 2021
[85] Interview, resident of Oromia Special Zone (woman), Galaan, June 2021
[86] CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, CEDAW/C/GC/30. Para.29.

varying degrees of violent extremism that followed after.[87] Furthermore, research covering the peace and security status of three countries in Asia found that normalisation of gender inequality and VAWG is a better predictor of support for VE than religiosity, which is a much more commonly cited factor.[88]

While the degree of gender-specific warning signs varied across the research sites, negative yet subtle changes in social norms targeting women and girls were present in all. These changes included restrictions on movement and dressing style, rise in early child marriage, and VAWG including economic violence. Granted a deeper investigation, such changes (i.e., sexist attitudes as well as discriminatory gender norms) can be used as an early indicator of spike in fundamentalism and extremist behaviour; anecdotal accounts of which exist from interviewees in the region of Amhara, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (with references to *Halaba* zone) and Oromia.

Conclusion

Building on gender relations of the Ethiopian society, the research uncovers multi-layered blind spots of P/CVE programmes and reasons for women's association in VE. It contributes to the ongoing gender mainstreaming effort in the field of security and P/CVE. It does so empirically by exploring the how and why of women's association with VE groups and ideologies, and conceptually, by analysing government-supported or led P/CVE programs.

Despite the sparse documentation of the relatively few P/CVE interventions undertaken by the government, the manner in which gender is framed and operationalised has been reductive. While the programmes under scrutiny recognise women's agency and the distinct ways they are culturally positioned to contribute to P/CVE efforts, they are founded upon the reductive rhetoric of womanhood. A critique of the programmes shows that for P/CVE efforts to be effective, they must be based on the realities of women's experiences with violent extremism rather than on gender stereotypes. This signals the potential for ongoing P/CVE efforts to be improved via conscientious apprehension of women's lived experiences through a gendered, intersectional lens.

Women's association in VE stems from diverse, often gendered, reasons and circumstances. Among those that have been researched are the hardening of in-group identity, sense of community and

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[87] Tesfaw, L. M., Kassie, A. B., & Flatie, B. T. (2021). Sexual violence and other complications of corona virus in Amhara Metropolitan Cities, Ethiopia. Risk management and healthcare policy, 14, 3563; Gebrewahd, G. T., Gebremeskel, G. G., & Tadesse, D. B. (2020). Intimate partner violence against reproductive age women during COVID-19 pandemic in northern Ethiopia 2020: a community-based cross-sectional study. Reproductive health, 17(1), 1-8.

[88] Pablo Castillo Díaz and Nahla Valji, (2019). Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New understandings and policy implications. Journal of International Affairs, 72(2), 39.; See also UNDP and UN Women (n 44)

seeking recognition, romanticism and fascination with a charismatic leader, as well as a sense of victimhood as a result of government action or inaction including gender-specific violations. All are contributing factors; mostly compounded and cumulatively present in individual cases.

These findings have policy implications as Ethiopian P/CVE efforts either neglect women's experiences in and with VE, or present their role in dichotomies of hapless victims or inherently peaceful beings. Nevertheless, one should not read the findings to mean women are equally as violent as men in the Ethiopian context. It is rather intended to add nuance to existing studies of violent extremism including understanding the gendered participation of women in VE itself as well as P/CVE efforts. At the very least, it is intended to prompt critical reflection on the need to include a gender lens from the very analysis of factors of radicalisation and VE to designing of P/CVE interventions: moving from stereotypes to research-based, intersectional gender analysis.

Recommendation: Ways Forward in Effecting Gendered PVE/CVE Responses

Encourage and enable gendered (intersectional) and feminist research analysis and policy design on P/CVE

➢ Support the development and the systematic adoption of a gendered approach to P/CVE including gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data and analysis.
➢ Raise awareness among government-affiliated and other security actors on the importance of intersectional analysis, the lack of which can further alienate and disempower communities who are more susceptible to VE influences.
➢ Design P/CVE policies and programmes through a feminist security lens, informed by gender relations that encompass women's and men's experiences within many categories of social identities rather than gender stereotypes and monolithic categorisation.

Significantly invest in integrated, context-specific and localised approaches to VE

➢ Invest in context-specific analysis and engagement to understand the drivers of violent extremism and their impacts on women, as well as the diverse roles of women in VE.
➢ Avail formal and informal platforms for the sustainable and systematic representation and participation of women in the drafting, implementation and review of P/CVE programmes and policies nationally.

➤ Forge and enhance meaningful partnerships with local elites including key women figures in ethnic and religious discourses in grassroots mobilisation and the diaspora, women's and youth groups, to build upon local practices and support local ownership.

Prioritise engendering and reforming of the security sector during the designing of P/CVE programs

➤ Ensure that P/CVE actors such as the police force do not reinforce harmful stereotypes and exploit existing infringements on women's human rights [Do No Harm] by respecting gender equality frameworks and Human Rights principles embedded in the Ethiopian constitution.

➤ Integrate the implementation of P/CVE policies and programmes that promote women's empowerment and agency – cognisant of diversity in lived experiences, noting the structural drivers to VE, such as sustained violations by state forces and private/non-state actors.

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